

Arsenal layoffs canceled

Workforce to stay at 302 — for now

From wire and staff reports

WASHINGTON — The Army has dropped its plans to lay off 130 workers from the Joliet Army Ammunition Plant — for now.

"I received notification that we were to return to our normal level of employment," said Ralph Miller, manager for Uniroyal Inc., which operates the plant.

Miller said there had been no layoffs at the plant since the Army put its plans on hold in mid-February. But during that time, Uniroyal was not allowed to replace about seven employees who retired.

The Army's order allows Uniroyal to hire the additional workers and bring the number of employees back to 302, Miller said.

"For the moment, the crisis is over," he said. "The Army told us that if the situation changes (we'll) be the first to know."

Miller said the loss of seven workers did not affect the work at the plant, but the rest of the employees felt the pressure while the Army made its decision.

"It was a trying time for all employees," he said.

The Army's decision was uncertain until Tuesday.

U.S. Rep. George O'Brien, R-Joliet, announced Tuesday that the Army has dropped its plans to lay off 130 employees at the Joliet plant, but two civilian Army employees contended no decision had been made.

An O'Brien aide claimed "we've got a deal" to avert the layoffs and contended the word had not filtered down to the two Army employees.

The O'Brien staffer said he was told late Tuesday by an aide to James R. Ambrose, under secretary of the Army, that any Uniroyal personnel reductions at Joliet this year would come from attrition, not layoffs.

O'Brien's announcement Tuesday that the layoffs were canceled was based on a message sent Tuesday to officials of Uniroyal Inc. and a letter from Ambrose which was delivered to O'Brien's office late Friday.

"The bottom line with respect to Joliet Ammunition plant is that there should be no net long-term decrease in employment level, although there may necessarily be some relatively small short-term fluctuations (up or down)," Ambrose said in the letter.

Uncertain what "no net long-term decrease" would mean to Joliet, O'Brien's office had delayed making the letter public pending clarification of whether the language meant there would be no layoffs at Joliet.

O'Brien thought that clarification came in a directive sent Tuesday to Uniroyal officials by Joanna Wysoke, contracting officer for the Armament, Munitions and Chemical Command at Rock Island, which oversees the Joliet plant.

Wysoke told Uniroyal that it was authorized to hire or call back, if necessary, a maximum of 302 employees.

Since that number would enable Uniroyal to maintain its current workforce without layoffs, O'Brien said it meant there would be no layoffs.